

Stephen Friedman Gallery

TimeOut

David Shrigley: Mayfair Tennis Ball Exchange review

Eddy Frankel

19 November 2021

TimeOut

David Shrigley: Mayfair Tennis Ball Exchange review



Image: Copyright David Shrigley, courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery. Photo by Mark Blower.

Time Out says 5 out of 5 stars

David Shrigley's gone full Ronseal. 'Mayfair Tennis Ball Exchange', his latest show, is exactly what it says it is: a gallery filled with fresh new tennis balls that you can come and swap an old ball of yours for. That's it. That's the show.

And somehow, it's great. The gallery has that new ball pong wafting through it, it's eye-tinglingly bright with the lights bouncing off the fluorescent fluffy material, a proper assault on the senses. And over the course of the exhibition, that smell will dissipate and the neon will fade as these new balls get replaced with manky old ones. Already on the first day one has the word 'PIG' scrawled across it in thick marker, one is filthy grey, another is torn in half. The pristine shelves are already becoming nasty and gross. It's decay happening in real time on the gallery walls.

It's very silly, obviously, but it's also very good. Partly because it looks like a classic art installation – it feels and reads like something that should be in a contemporary art gallery – just made out of tennis balls. But also because it's proper conceptual art, with proper ideas about time and ageing and wear and tear and decay and use. It's about going from clean to filthy, from new and nice to old and shit, just like all of us, like our bodies and minds. It's clever, it's funny, and it's probably the best thing David Shrigley has ever done.

And you should all be very grateful that I didn't end this review by saying this is art worth making a racquet about. Or that I 15-love it. You know, like tennis.